Digital Photography "Selfies" as an Intervention for Decreasing Intrapersonal Role Conflict in Working Parents

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Albertus Magnus College

Submitted in partial completion of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Art Therapy and Counseling (MAATC)

May 2023

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Albertus Magnus College

DATE: March 3, 2023

Re: IRB#: 20230303-EC

Dear Eric,

This letter serves as an official approval by the Albertus Magnus College IRB for you to conduct the study on "selfies and role conflict" as described in the IRB application submitted on 2/28/23. Once you begin the study, please ensure that the confidentiality of your research participants is properly protected and that you remain within the boundaries you stated in the IRB application. If those boundaries change in relation to the study participants, please notify the IRB as an amendment may be necessary.

Your study is authorized to begin as of the date of this approval letter and is valid for one year, ending on March 3rd, 2024.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Joshua Abreu, the IRB Administrator, by e-mail at jabreu1@albertus.edu.

Sincerely,

Joshua Abreu, Ph.D.
IRB Administrator

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

This pilot study explored how working parents could benefit from effective and accessible interventions that strengthen work/family boundaries, such as the use of selfie photography as an intervention to reduce intrapersonal role conflict. It was hypothesized that selfie photography would decrease levels of family-work conflict (FWC) among working parents, thereby assisting in overall family-work balance, to attain a state of equilibrium, and finding meaning in everyday life. A total of four participants completed the experiential procedures. Although not statistically significant, a slight increase in FWC was notable in the results. An informal review of the photographs submitted suggests the use of selfies, in conjunction with the expertise of an art therapist to clinically process conflicts experienced by working parents, may be an important next step in the research.

Keywords: selfie, role-conflict, family-work balance, art therapy

Digital Photography 'Selfies' as an Intervention for Decreasing Intrapersonal Role Conflict in Working Parents

When career conflicts with family or family conflicts with careers, we may face inter-role conflicts, such as Work-Family Conflict (WFC) or Family-Work Conflict (FWC). Many working parents experience some level of WFC and/or FWC, which could lead to psychological conflicts (van Steenbergen et al., 2007). Viktor Frankl (1946/2006) stated that "striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man...unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone" (p. 99). For some, not many roles in life inspire a search for meaning more than being a parent, especially when a parent also has a professional career. The duality of parenting and enjoying family life while simultaneously fostering personal satisfaction in a professional career is sometimes referred to as a family-work balance. Having a career, or one's life's work, and loving others are ways to discover the meaning of life or reach a meaningful existence (Frankl, 1946/2006). However, when career and family roles conflict, we may face inter-role conflict (Cooklin et al., 2014; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified Work-Family Conflict (WFC) as a form of inter-role conflict in which the demands of an individual's career interfere with family-related responsibilities. Likewise, Family-Work Conflict (FWC) is a form of inter-role conflict in which the demands of the family interfere with work performance and responsibilities (Weer & Greenhaus, 2014). Inter-role conflict could interfere with finding meaning in one's life, by loving and working and discovering balance between the two.

Support strategies using smart devices may help mitigate some of the conflicts in WFC and FCW (Althammer et al., 2021). The popularity of the smartphone has made digital photography more accessible to individuals than ever. These devices can do more than just make

a call or send a text; they may serve as an effective intervention to improve emotional well-being (Kopytin, 2018). It is suggested that intentionally making the time to take a selfie with one's child each morning may decrease feelings of conflict that arise between one's family life and one's career.

Working Parents

Parents who work are at risk of compromising their parenting and their relationship with their partners because of the level of tension that arises from holding multiple roles (Cooklin et al., 2014; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Many working parents experience some level of WFC and/or FWC with different effects, including psychological and strain-based conflicts. For example, parents experiencing Family-Work Conflict (FWC) may find themselves distracted by family responsibilities or issues at work, while parents who find their parenting/family activities distracted by off-hour work responsibilities may experience Work-Family Conflict (WFC) as described by various authors (Cooklin et al., 2014; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Netemeyer et al., 1996; Weer & Greenhaus, 2014).

Van Steenbergen et al. (2007) noted that psychological conflict occurs when individuals are not able to mentally stay in their present role due to intruding thoughts of another role. Furthermore, strain-based conflict occurs when the physical rigors and emotional or mental demands of one role interfere with another role (Carlson et al., 2000). While WFC and work-related stressors are associated with increased conflicts over time (Shreffler et al., 2011). Cooklin et al. (2014) found that there is the potential for employment to enrich the lives of parents who work, for example, they found significant relationships between higher WFC and parental traits of lower warmth and higher irritability, while work enrichment was associated with warm and consistent parent-child interactions and higher quality couple relationships. These results suggest

that work environments can both positively and negatively impact parental engagement with their children. Additional evidence suggests that the recent COVID-19 pandemic has impacted inter-role conflict, including an increase in FWC for all educational categories of women in general and highly educated men, as well as an increase in WFC among highly educated women (Verweij et al., 2021). This shows a need for more research in the area of inter-role conflict, specifically in the area of FWC and possible interventions.

Interventions for Family-Work Balance

Research has shown that mindfulness interventions (such as learning how to keep awareness in the present moment) may reduce psychological and strain-based conflict and improve work-life satisfaction (Althammer et al., 2021). Additionally, *boundary theory*, or the practice of strengthening boundaries between work and home life activities, can provide a balance between family and work responsibilities (Ashforth et al., 2000). Strategies such as having specific work times and locations devoted to each role have been found to be useful. Some individuals prefer to have segmentation or rigid separation between work and family roles, while others prefer integrating the two. Of these two distinctions, integration may lead to blurring or bleeding of the boundaries between the roles (Ashforth et al., 2000). Having a strong sense of separation between the two roles may reduce the level of FWC. Having a solid sense of individuals' identities, as they relate to our family roles as parents, aids in the segmentation between family and work (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Photography may help to build a sense of connectedness to others and individual identity (Weiser, 2004). When people photograph themselves with others, they encounter an opportunity to define themselves and their bonds with loved ones within the images they capture and then reflect upon. Digital photography can record a moment in time (Peterson, 2015). Using this

device to capture and reflect upon the moment's meaning may help focus and ground a parent in the present moment. Photographs can do this in a way that little else can, with minimal need for artistic training or talent (Kopytin, 2004).

This research paper aims to explore if having a photograph as an emotional connection to family members when separated by work might effectively reduce FWC. For example, a person might look at a photo of a loved one while at work to feel connected without fully engaging with them, which might otherwise cause a distraction from work. Photographs of oneself and loved ones (also known as selfies) can be reminders of the importance of family in their lives without the need to be physically present. Selfies have the potential to reinforce what is essential in our lives. To this end, selfies that include family members may have the ability to strengthen a family identity in working parents who experience intrapersonal role conflict (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Photography

Research has shown that photography can be an effective therapeutic intervention (Kopytin, 2004; Peterson, 2015; Saita & Tramontano, 2018; Weiser, 2004; Wolf, 2007). The first known engagement with photography for patient care was reported in an 1856 article by Dr. Hugh Diamond (as cited in Saita & Tramontano, 2018). Since then, several critical effects of phototherapy and therapeutic photography have been identified, including mindfulness, self-understanding, communication, and self-growth, as well as its uses as a healing modality when photographs are used to tell stories (Kopytin, 2004; Peterson, 2015; Saita & Tramontano, 2018; Weiser, 2004).

There are various terms and applications for the use of photography as an intervention. For example, Weiser (2014) described *phototherapy* or *photo art therapy,* as a treatment

intervention in which a clinician facilitates the use of photography and/or photographs. Photography can also be especially effective with clients who are nonverbal or who prefer not to talk about specific issues (Weiser, 2004). Different photographic methods, such as self-portraiture and photo-presentation, can elicit varied responses and address individuals' specific needs (Weiser, 2014).

Photo art therapy is a subcategory of phototherapy and, therefore, on the clinical continuum. Weiser (2014) described five basic phototherapy techniques: "(1) photos taken by the client, (2) photos of the client taken by other people, (3) self-portraits, (4) family albums, and (5) *photo-projectives*. *Photo-projectives* are based on the idea that the meaning of any photo is derived by the viewer ***during*** the process of viewing it, taking it, or creating it and therefore have the potential for therapeutic work with the client" (p. 167). This author further noted that *therapeutic photography* is an individual activity that can be completed in a therapeutic session or done without the assistance of a trained therapist. Additionally, Weiser (2004) suggests that one's engagement in photography techniques are therapeutically useful to enhance self-reflection, assess relationships, build coping skills, and increase levels of positive communication. In particular, "simple ordinary 'nonart' photographs" (Weiser, 2004, p. 23) can provide insightful imagery without the need for extensive art training (Ginicola et al., 2012). Engagement in photography and digital skills in conjunction with a therapist has additionally been shown to build rapport in assessment/diagnosis, intervention/treatment, and termination (Ginicola et al., 2012).

In a review of the available literature, working parents who continue to strive for a better family-work balance might benefit from effective and accessible interventions which aim to strengthen family/work boundaries and identity centrality in both areas of their lives. Though

family photographs are an integral part of family history and identity, there is a dearth of literature and minimal research regarding the use of selfies as an intervention for the reduction of intrapersonal role conflict. Additionally, there is a need to have studies regarding role conflict and effective interventions.

Parent/child selfies can be a powerful reminder of one's family when they are separated by work. Using digital photography in this way can be a potent link for parents, who often spend a great deal of time away from their children due to work responsibilities. Incorporating the use of family selfies over time as a recurring ritual might strengthen family bonds while simultaneously reducing parental inter-role conflict between family/work identities and ultimately increasing family-work balance. The study investigates the intrapersonal role conflict that working parents may feel and how digital photography, specifically selfies with their children, can be used as a practical intervention to decrease levels of FWC in working parents**.**

It is hypothesized that utilizing parent/child selfie photography as an intervention will decrease levels of family-work conflict among working parents, thereby assisting in overall family-work balance, attaining a state of equilibrium, and finding meaning in everyday life.

Method

Participants

This study used a snowball sample. Participants were recruited using social media postings, physical fliers in local businesses, and social networking. To be eligible for this study, participants must have been: a) 18 years of age or older, b) a parent of one or more children who are living with them, and c) working at least 20 hours a week. They also must have had access to a cellphone, digital camera, or tablet with a camera. Attempts were made to recruit participants from diverse backgrounds (e.g., gender identities, ethnicities, ages, etc.) and family structures

(e.g., two-parent, single-parent, stepfamilies, adoptive families, etc.) There were, in total, four participants in this study whose data were eligible, all of whom identified as women, were married, and worked at worksites outside of the home. The mean age of the participants was 42.75 (*SD* = 5.38). The mean number of children living at home was 2.75 (*SD* = 0.97). 50% of the participants identified as white/Caucasian (n = 2), 25% as Latino/Latinx (n = 1), and another 25% as mixed ethnicities (n = 1). The highest level of education obtainment of the sample was as follows: 25% had a high school diploma (N=1), 50% had a bachelor's degree (N=2), and 25% had a master's degree (N=1).

Instruments

Demographic Items

Demographic information was gathered on participants' age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, the highest level of education, number of children at home, number of hours worked each week (i.e., hourly/salary), and work location (i.e., work-at-home, or traditional work site).

Measures

The Family-Work Conflict scale (FWC) was utilized for this study (see Appendix A). The FWC scale consists of a five-item scale (Family-Work Conflict scale), which assesses family-work balance and the intrapersonal or inter-role conflict that individuals may experience when trying to balance work and family (Netemeyer et al.,1996). Individuals rated their level of agreement with items on a seven-point Likert-type rating scale. The FWC scale measured the intrapersonal conflict that family life causes on one's career or work. The following are examples of scale items:

"The demands of my family or spouse/partner interfere with work-related activities."

"Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties."

This scale has been found to be reliable and valid in previous studies (Netemeyer et al., 1996). The scale has been found to have coefficient alpha levels between .83 to .89, with an average alpha of .86 (Netemeyer et al., 1996). The measure above was strongly correlated with measures of life satisfaction ($r = -.44^{**}$, $p < .01$.)

Materials

The participants needed access to a digital camera, a cell phone, and/or a tablet with a built-in camera.

Procedures

Once IRB approval had been received, participants were recruited through snowball sampling via social media postings (see Appendix B). Engagement with participants (including the exchange of all demographic and release forms) was conducted via a secure electronic Google ® form affiliated with the researcher's institution.

Potential participants were asked to complete the informed consent form (see Appendix C). Once consent had been granted, participants completed a photographic image release form (see Appendix D). Participants were then randomly assigned to either the experimental group (GROUP A) or the control group (GROUP B). Both groups were asked to complete a demographic form (see Appendix E) and the FWC questionnaire. The experimental participants were then asked to "take a selfie" of themselves "with at least one of their children each day for five days before going to work." The control group was asked to "take a solo selfie each day for five days before going to work." A follow-up secure electronic Google ® form survey was sent out to participants on the sixth day, including the post-intervention FWC questionnaire. They were also directed to submit their selfies to the researcher. Finally, all participants were debriefed

at the end of the Google ® form. The debriefing section (see Appendix F) explained the purpose of the study and reminded subjects regarding the nature of the art release form, the approach to confidentiality in the photographs. Upon completion of the study, one random participant received a fifty-dollar gift card as an incentive.

Paired T-Test Analysis

The results from the pre-test (M = 32.25, SD = 2.87) and post-test (M = 29.50, SD = 4.66) indicated that there was no significant difference after the art-based intervention on FWC $t(3) = 2.09$, $p = 0.06$.

Discussion

Due to limited research on using selfies as an intervention in art therapy, this pilot study attempted to establish how digital photography might assist working parents with intrapersonal role conflict. It was hypothesized that parents taking a selfie with their children before work each day would experience a decrease in Family-Work Conflict (FWC) and develop a stronger family-work balance and personal meaning (Althammer et al., 2021; Ashforth et al., 2000; Carlson et al., 2000; Frankl 2006 (1946), Netemeyer et al., 1996; Weiser 2004 & 2014). Results were expected to show a decrease in FWC after the intervention compared to the control group. However, the results were not significant, most probably due to the limited power of the study. Although a minimum of 30 participants were expected, the study only received a total of fourteen respondents, with only eleven who met the eligibility criteria for this study. Three individuals were not eligible for this study: one with children over the age of 18, one with no children, and one who did not work a minimum of 20 hours a week.

Instructions to complete the demographics and pre-survey, take a Selfie before work each day for five days, then submit the photos and take the post-survey on the sixth day were

completed by five participants within the timeframe allotted. All individuals in the utilized data set were married and female-identified and consisted of three individuals who identified as white/Caucasian, one Latino/Latinx, and one who identified as mixed ethnicities. Only one male-identified participant completed the study, but it was not in a timely manner, therefore the data was not included in the results. Those randomly assigned to the experimental group (*n = 4*) worked at traditional work sites, while the participant in the control group (*n = 1*) worked at home. Due to limited participants, control group data did not provide significant results. It is important to note that no data, from the control group, was included in the results section.

The collected results indicated a slight, yet not statistically significant, increased level of FWC after the selfie intervention among the four participants who completed the study as expected. Therefore, in place of a more robust data analysis, an informal review of the digital photographs was conducted. Art Therapist's use of selfies was also limited in the research literature, but Weiser's (2014) definition of *photo-projectives* provided a basis for the use of any photograph as a therapeutic object. The results of the current study which show increased conflict; however, may indicate a necessity for the therapeutic processing of the photographs with a trained art therapist for optimal results. This shift in the data is noteworthy since a decrease in conflict was hypothesized. The results suggest that using selfies alone (without therapeutic support) may have resulted in an increased level of conflict in parents.

Upon review, nothing is remarkable about the four sets of photographs. Of note is one participant who may have enjoyed being part of the study, as evidenced by the various smiley emojis incorporated into the submitted selfie photographs (see Figure 1). Each emoji seems to mirror the person's face being covered due to the use of open and closed-mouth representations. The selfie photos seem to show a close-knit relationship between the family members and an all-

around jovial attitude toward the study.

(Figure 1)

Limitations of this study are numerous, with the most significant issue being the lack of expected sample size. Many aspects of the general population were not represented, such as those who were unmarried or living separately but still raising children together. Although one participant worked from home, and it may be argued that the data could have provided a meaningful comparison, not being in a traditional work setting may have instead created excess variables in the data. Furthermore, due to the limited sample size, this study did not have a functional control group for comparison. In addition, the results may have been skewed due to the longitudinal process of the study, which may have seemed overwhelming to some

participants, possibly limiting some participants' willingness to complete the study. It would have been beneficial to have kept track of which selfie was taken on which day to see if there was any noticeable change in the affect of the people in the photos. It is unclear if it was the use of the word "selfie," but the submitted photos seem to show minimal to no change in affect from the first photograph to the last.

In future research on this subject, it is recommended that a larger sample consisting of a more accurate representation of the general population is sought. Additionally, a more extended timeframe (beyond five consecutive days) could be significant. More precise directions to indicate the importance of timeliness between the fifth day of work (last selfie) and the post-survey might also be an essential change to expand on this pilot study. It also would be interesting to see if the photos would have been more varied if participants had instead been asked for a candid photo each day. In a post-COVID-19 world, at-home versus traditional work settings may seriously affect any comparisons of FWC and this is another notation for future research.

Based on the increase in selfie-taking in our society and the lack of research on the uses of selfies in treatment, this area is an important focus for understanding parental abilities to find a healthy balance between family and work, and their ability to find true 'meaning' in life from working and loving (Frankl, 1946/2006). Future research might aim to explore how taking a selfie and processing it with a trained art therapist could create opportunities for working parents to deepen their understanding of work/family roles, find balance in both areas, and gain meaning from their career and parenting while reducing levels of Family-Work Conflict. This type of research may lead to a better understanding of the self, which may lead to a fuller balance between family and work.

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Appendix A

(NETEMEYER, BOLES, AND McMURRIAN 1996)

Family-Work Conflict Scale

7- point (strongly disagree–strongly agree) response scale

1. The demands of my family or spouse/partner interfere with work-related activities.
2. I have to put off doing things at work because of demands on my time at home.
3. Things I want to do at work don't get done because of the demands of my family or spouse/partner.
4. My home life interferes with my responsibilities at work such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, and working overtime.
5. Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties.

Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer

What's Life all about?
Can your selfies give you insight?
Please consider participating in this study about the selfie.
Participants must be:
18 years of age or older &
Parents who work a minimum of 20 hours a week
Have a digital camera, cellphone or tablet w/camera
1 random participant who completes the study will recieve a $50 giftcard

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

This study is being conducted as part of the requirements for the Masters of Arts in Art Therapy and Counseling degree at Albertus Magnus College. The goal of this study is to explore the use of the selfie as an intervention for role conflict. During this study, you will be asked to take a selfie once a day for five days and to complete pre and post intervention questionnaires about your roles as a working parent. Due to the nature of the digital selfie photography please blur or blot out any recognizable facial features or the researcher of this study will blur or blot out any recognizable facial features in the photographs. All information collected will be confidential. The photographs and questionnaires will be numbered, and your name will not be connected to the photographs in any way.

Potential risks involved in this study may include frustration with the selfie process and possible negative feeling from the questionnaires mentioned above. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you are able to withdraw at any point in time without penalty. The benefits of participating include assisting a graduate student in the completion of his thesis requirement, as well as contributing to research in art therapy.

Investigator	Art Therapy Advisor	Psychology Advisor
Eric M. Capitao emcapitao@albertus.edu	Dr. Rebecca Arnold rarnold@albertus.edu	Dr. Neda Moinolmolki nmoinolmolki@albertus.edu

Or:
Chair of IRB

By signing this form, I acknowledge that:
I'm 18 years of age or older,
I'm a parent of a child who is under the age of 18 and who lives with me,
I work at least 20 hours a week,
I understand the study described above, and
I agree to participate in the aforementioned study.

_____

Print Name Date

_____

Signature

_____ I have received a copy of this form to keep for myself.

Appendix D

Art Release Form

Art Image Release Form: Selfies and Role Conflict

The artwork you create during this study will remain confidential. Your name will not be connected to your artwork. Your photographs will not contain any identifying information.

I agree to have my photographs, without any identifying information, (any recognizable facial features will be blurred or blotted out), used for the following purpose(s):

(Please check all that apply)

- ◊ Educational and training purposes
- ◊ Presentation at a professional conference
- ◊ Publication in a professional journal
- ◊ None of the above

I hereby give consent as noted above for the use of my artwork

Print Name Date

Signature

Please note that, if at a later date you chose to withdraw permission for your artwork to be shown as noted above, it may be difficult or impossible to contain images already disseminated in public settings.

_____ I have received a copy of this form to keep for myself.

Appendix E

Demographic Form

1.) What is your age: _____

2.) What best describes how you identify your gender:
__ Woman
__ Man
__ Non-Binary/Third gender
__ Other (please specify) _____
__ Prefer not to say

3.) Which best describes your race and ethnicity: Check all that apply:
__ Asian
__ Black/African American
__ Hispanic/Latinx
__ Native American
__ Pacific Islander
__ White/Caucasian
__ Other (please specify) _____
__ Prefer not to say

4.) What is your current relationship status: Check all that apply:
__ Single
__ Casual Relationship(s)
__ Committed Relationship(s)
__ Engaged
__ Married
__ Divorced
__ Polygamous
__ Monogamous
__ Widow/Widower
__ Other (please specify) _____
__ Prefer not to say

5.) What is your current level of education?
___ High School
___ Associates Degree
___ Bachelor's Degree
___ Master's Degree
___ Doctorate
___ Prefer not to answer

6.) Do you work Full Time or Part Time?
___ Full Time
___ Part Time

7.) Where do you work?
___ At a traditional job site
___ Work-at-home

8.) How many children do you have living at home: _____

Appendix F

Instruction Sheet A

Please take a selfie a day with at least one of your children, each day before going to work.

Upon the sixth day please submit the photos with any recognizable facial features blurred or blotted out, if you do not know how to do this, the researcher can do it for you upon receipt of the photos.

You will be asked to again complete the research questions and your participation will be complete.

Thank you for participating in this study.

Instruction Sheet B

Please take a solo selfie a day each day before going to work.

Upon the sixth day please submit the photos with any recognizable facial features blurred or blotted out, if you do not know how to do this, the researcher can do it for you upon receipt of the photos.

You will be asked to again complete the research questions and your participation will be complete.

Thank you for participating in this study.

Appendix G

Debriefing Form

Debriefing Form: Selfies and Role Conflict

This study aimed to test the hypothesis that digital selfies can be utilized as an effective intervention for working parents who may be experiencing conflict between their role as a parent and their role as a worker. Research has suggested that creating segmentation between the roles helps keep the level of conflict between the roles lower and that creating a strong identity as a parent may assist in this segmentation. This study had two conditions: one where participants took solo selfies each day before work, and a second where participants took selfies with at least one of their children each day before work.

The hypothesis was that the condition where participants took selfies with at least one of their children would experience a decrease in their reported role conflict perceptions.

If you would like to know the results of this study, please provide your email address to the researchers. Please note that the results can only be provided in aggregate.

SOCIETY OF BEHAVIORAL MEDICINE

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